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PAKISTAN | Rimsha Masih granted bail in blasphemy case

Rimsha Masih, the young Christian girl who was detained on blasphemy charges in Pakistan, was today granted bail by the court after more than three weeks behind bars.

The decision was reached after a lengthy hearing dominated by challenges from the prosecution lawyers, regarding the validity of official medical reports on Rimsha's age and mental capacity.

A large bail sum has been guaranteed, however Rimsha's actual release is expected to be delayed. Her defense team now intends to push for full dismissal.

Yesterday, a police-led investigation team was formed by Pakistan's Interior Ministry to oversee and report on the blasphemy case.

Rimsha Masih, who has Down's Syndrome and is deemed to be fourteen years old, was charged with desecrating the Qur'an under section 295B of the Pakistan Penal Code (PPC). Her case has attracted support from senior Islamic clerics in Pakistan, as well as a high-level of international attention.

Christian Solidarity Worldwide's (CSW's) Chief Executive Officer Mervyn Thomas said, "We welcome the decision to allow Rimsha to leave prison after her three week ordeal and hope that she will be reunited with her family as soon as possible. However, the case is far from resolved – we urge the Pakistani authorities to ensure the family's safety and to be alert to signs of potential religiously-motivated violence targeting Christian communities. We urge the court to process Rimsha's case without delay and the police-led investigation team to use its position to highlight both the multiple injustices present in this instance and broader concerns surrounding the application of Pakistan's blasphemy laws."